

# The Yellow Lord

By Will Levington Comfort

**Supreme Monarch of an Island Fortress That Lay Like a Jewel on the Purple Waters of the Southern Seas—This Was The Yellow Lord. No Man Had Crossed His Path and Lived. Read of the Coming of Bowditch, Soldier of Fortune; of His Love for the Girl Chireen, and of the War That Broke the Monarch's Power :: ::**

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SYNOPSIS OF PRECEDING CHAPTER.

John Bowditch, American soldier of fortune, finds himself stranded in a small, remote island, and attempts to get to sea by means of a small boat. He is rescued by a native, who takes him to the Yellow Lord, the beautiful daughter of Major Holt, and Jerry Comitu, who is competing against the Yellow Lord.

## CHAPTER III.

(Continued.)

PRESENTLY every sense was keen with the consciousness of dawn. The smell of the sea came in. The dawn wind rustled the thin foliage at the window. I dressed and went out quietly, through the pepper grove again to the ledge trail. The harbor was gray with a trailing mist. The moon had lost her mystery. She was speeding down over the sea to the north of the portal—the secret of her ghostliness already revealed. A step presently, and Jerry Comitu appeared behind me. We chatted for a few minutes, as dawn came riding up over the bay, and as we walked toward the ledge trail I drew that Comitu had a confession to make—that he had taken a fancy to me. He was a boy, a great boy, possibly a great bad boy. I didn't feel my morals flourishing themselves in Magdalena—that is, away from Chireen Holt. I saw that Comitu wanted things, and didn't have enough to do, and drank and ate too much, and had lingered too long in the tropics, and didn't have any particular reverence for his family life, though a kind of savage idolatry for Magda. . . . all this to explain that I took his words about fancying me with a bit of testing acid.

"You've been down to the yacht Jeez, 'it' he said. 'Did you go below?'"

"I was at a loss for a minute; his question was so sudden and harked back so queerly to my stepping aboard the Jeezabel."

"No."

"Ever see soft gold?"

I shook my head.

"Gold that you can carve with your thumb nail?"

"No. Has the Jeezabel got a cargo of that stuff?"

"Not yet, Bowditch—not yet. . . . She would have," he added unwarily, "if I had her. You haven't been long in the tea business?"

"No. It's rather exciting, though, this first twenty-four hours."

"I'll drag before long, has to me. I came down here looking for treasure."

"You've always looked for treasure, haven't you?" I asked, recalling some intimations he had made the night before of early days between the Americas, sailing out from both sides of the Isthmus.

"Come to think of it—yes. I'd like to be in Catten's shoes, sailing her out through the portal to the rough water. I'd know where to take her."

"Oh, yes, I'd know how to set her pretty little head."

There was a delectable pause, and he asked, looking down in his jerky way.

"Didn't you see any diving apparatus on the Jeezabel, did you?"

"Oh, I remember, you didn't get below to the main deck."

I smiled.

"No diving suits, Mr. Comitu—no caudal fins or chests corded with wire rope and full of golden doubloons and pistoles and pieces of eight."

I saw a gleam in his eyes, and he raised them in a troubled way, as if following a bird in the air. The suspicion came to me that I had really touched a weak place in his mind—that there was one of the adventures, world-old, who chase the dream of hidden treasure up and down the seas. It came to me again how he had spoken of the treasure ships of Spain and her early and fastidious looting of Mother Mexico, the losses and deadly wastes of it all.

"Has Magdalena Bay any treasure history?" I inquired.

"No," he said in a sharp tone, red showing under the dark of his face.

"She is a bit far from the Spanish Main," I observed leisurely, "but she has all the enchantments, all the romance, so to speak. One need only shut his eyes and see the old Spanish galleons running in here for shelter—possibly being followed by men-of-war."

"Let me have one of those cigarettes of yours," he said.

## CHAPTER IV.

THE first people to show you cordiality when you come to a settlement are not those, as a rule, who become your real affiliations. Comitu made much of me, and I was not slow to note that this fact complicated my standing with Major Holt; at the same time I was a bit stubborn on the point. I felt capable of playing all ends, and not being tied in any particularship. In the next few days the characters and inter-relations of the Yellow Lord's establishment cleared somewhat to my mind.

I rode plantations a little with Comitu, but wearied of his repeatedly confessed hatred of the work. The sea called him truly, and the smell of the water-front. I was anxious to know how he got started in the treasure-search, and at the end of one long afternoon, as we were riding in from the tea-lands, he told me of his beginnings in New York a quarter of a century ago.

"No, I didn't come down here for my health, though I used to dream

Yes, I used to sit in an office—a real business man in busy New York. He was silent for a period, and then asked if he had told me about the old man who died on him back there in New York. He knew he hadn't.

"He came to Duane Street—an old sailor man. Many times he came. Wanted us to stake him," he went on less jerkily. "He knew he could find the place. He had the papers. Why, Bowditch, it was such a story as you'd read. We laughed at it. We lived with our brains back home in New York, and yet we laughed at that old man. . . . I mind him sitting across his chair cooked up against the wall, telling his story over and over again—no patient about it. I think he told it a thousand times. We listened and looked at each other. If things were doing, we'd drive him out, but he'd always come back. His old white head brushed with a wet brush, and began the story of the treasure he'd taken us to. Then finally he rolled off the chair telling it, and that was the day they were pressing me pretty close. I took from him the little papers that he carried in a black case. . . . I called to them that old Archibald had a fit—called the goorman to come and take him out. It was a fit."

"And you've carried those little

papers all these years?" I asked idly. "You see, he sort of wished 'em on me, Bowditch."

"That's queer," I muttered. "The minute I looked into Magdalena there was something like this opened up to me—not unken treasure particularly, but treasure."

"It's got nothing to do with Magdalena," he answered, his face darkening.

## CHAPTER V.

THE Virgin came in, and I saw at once that life was different with Catten in the establishment—more banter, more mystery, more drinking. I found myself farther from, instead of nearer to, Chireen Holt, because of association with the young Englishman, who favored me as Jerry Comitu had done. Catten was more a voice of authority in the establishment, and accordingly could use more time to any advantage he pleased.

I got better acquainted with both Comitu and the island a few days later when Jerry asked me to ride out to the active village with him. I told the Holts of the invitation and made my plans to leave. Just as I was starting Lance Holt tapped at my door, big Shilda harking at his heels. . . . The lad was a favorite of mine—a light about him, a lift and spring and bit of silence to go with a smile. I had a suspicion he could die cheerfully for anybody he cared for.

"We've got a present for you, Mr. Bowditch," he said, handing me a little gun, a Wares-Metric, one of the finest and fanciest of the moderns.

We rode down to the shore and walked the mounts along the sand to the group of Chinese sentries that prevented the islanders from passing below on the strand. This sentry-post was directly under the end of the east wing on the cliff above, and a similar post was kept on the other side of the shore at the Jeezabel's landing.

The palisades became less abrupt, and presently we reached the single gentle opening from the shore to the interior—hills sloping down to the water level instead of bluffs. Here the strand was very wide and the native fisheries were located. Many big canoes for harbor and outside work were lying up. Here also we struck the hard-packed trail that led back to the native village. We dined with the native chief Labulano that evening, and slept in his guest chamber.

As we turned in Jerry was quiet for some minutes; then volunteered to smoke one of my brand. Presently he inquired long and carefully where and

how the tobacco blends were procured, discussing the flavor with a connoisseur's zeal, which he was not. I saw he was sparring for time and had something real to divulge. He was silent for a bit, then another fold of meaning from my wise remarks about the natives seemed to clear his mind—seeped in, so to speak, and he took advantage of it.

"They treat 'em like hell, around the world."

"Meaning the natives, I suppose?"

"They're not getting a square deal here," he remarked.

There were two candles still burning, and natives at the fans. I turned to Comitu invitingly, but did not venture to speak.

"Yes, I'll tell you," he repeated. "They think I'm a little slow up plantations, when I belong to the water."

I have often noticed that a man enraptured with his own acumen is slow to grant anybody else having any. Playing with him just then got me into serious trouble as I look at it from a distance like this of the writing end. Jerry would never have let me into something of his secret that night if he hadn't been driven full of torment and unrest.

He didn't tell me the name of the island, but he came in a lot closer about the paper old Archibald left when he died in Duane Street; he

said he had the island located, and the place where the treasure had been dumped in the harbor; that he had looked down in the still waters and seen the salt-crusted and iron-hooped chests of gold—"enough gold to send Columbus out of Palos with a new fleet every day, for a couple of years."

It was the simplest thing in the world, he was saying. . . . The island was the last and loneliest out of travel lines, but perfect as Magdalena in most respects, in some superior. The harbor was smaller, but just as safe and not so high as our shaggy-lined port. He stated Magda had been there and had looked over with him from a native canoe which they were poling themselves, according to directions; that the people were simple and friendly; that he, Jerry Comitu, could always get along with natives; that they wanted a white king badly, and he was to spare for a while; that he had been practicing the king stuff here in Magdalena and elsewhere, and knew what he was talking about.

"Say, Bowditch," he went on, "if you think these poor boobies of Magdalena are simple and childish and affectionate, you ought to see our own people over in—"

He laughed and added:

"I've got an idea I'll be letting you in on the name and charts presently."

"We need money for equipment, Bowditch," he said quietly. "Quite a little money, old son, and more than that we need a ship—a brigantine, preferably an auxiliary. In fact, we need the Jeezabel."

(To Be Continued.)

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